

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

**ALL-COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE (ACIN) NO. I-44-05**

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL COUNTY WELFARE SPOCs
ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES
PROGRAM MANAGERS
CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- ☐ State Law Change
- ☐ Federal Law or Regulation Change
- ☐ Court Order
- ☐ Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- ☒ Initiated by CDSS

SUBJECT: ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE ANALYSIS AND REPORTING SYSTEM (AFCARS) – COMPLETE, ACCURATE, AND TIMELY ENTRY AND UPDATE OF CHILD WELFARE SERVICES/CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (CWS/CMS) DATA

REFERENCE: ALL COUNTY LETTER (ACL) NO. 04-45, DATED OCTOBER 26, 2004; ACL NO. 03-61, DATED DECEMBER 2, 2003; COUNTY FISCAL LETTER NO. 04/05-39, DATED FEBRUARY 28, 2005; ACIN NO. I-26-04, DATED MAY 18, 2004; ACIN NO. I-01-04, DATED JANUARY 13, 2004

This All County Information Notice (ACIN) serves as a reminder of the need to provide complete, accurate, and timely data entry and updates to meet critical Child Welfare Services Program documentation, data reporting, and program performance measurement requirements. Federal determination of State performance outcomes which could result in potential federal funding penalties are based on the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS).

In June 2004, the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted an AFCARS Assessment Review to validate and verify the accuracy and completeness of CWS/CMS information used to report AFCARS data. Among other things, the ACF determined that California did not substantially comply with the AFCARS reporting requirements due to missing or incorrect data. The ACF required California to develop and implement an AFCARS improvement plan and set timeframes to improve data entry processes to meet the required data collection standards. To help achieve that goal, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is providing this clarifying ACIN and will expand the AFCARS information provided in the CWS/CMS new user training manual and in county refresher/advanced training. The CDSS is also working to create a CWS/CMS AFCARS training tool.

The following county actions should occur to improve the data and data reporting:

1. **Complete, Accurate, and Timely Data Entry and Updates.** Pursuant to the jointly developed County Welfare Directors Association and the Department's System (Full) Utilization Policy, completion of AFCARS fields is a condition for county eligibility for Child Welfare Services funding augmentation (cross-reference CFL 04/05-39).

In CWS/CMS, supervisors and staff can review and update all AFCARS data fields from the *AFCARS Navigation Tool*. (Select *AFCARS* after starting the *Navigation Tools* from the *Toolz* drop down menu or the *Tool Man* button.) Once in the AFCARS navigation screen, incomplete AFCARS fields display a green background; completed AFCARS fields display a white background; shadowed fields do not yet apply to the case.

To update the green AFCARS fields, click on the *Open File* button next to the field and follow the instruction steps. The updated AFCARS fields will display a white background when you return to the AFCARS navigation screen.

Complete, accurate, and timely data entry is critical, such as end-dating placement episodes. Supervisors should ensure that staff correctly enters and updates this information as it is obtained. Please note that functionality in the *AFCARS Navigation Tool* for placement-related information corresponds to the current AFCARS reporting period only. As a result, staff may view green fields from the *AFCARS Navigation Tool* and then navigate to the *AFCARS* field and find the fields containing data entered for a different reporting period. The data in these fields needs to be updated for the current AFCARS reporting period. (There is no change to the functionality that allows counties to select a different date range to review earlier AFCARS reporting periods.)

2. **Review of All Open Cases of Children with Removal Episodes that Occurred Prior to CWS/CMS Conversion.** The AFCARS file review indicated errors in the date of first removal, date of latest removal, and total number of removals. The CDSS requests that counties review the open cases of children with removal episodes that occurred before CWS/CMS conversion and correct any errors in the removal data.
3. **AFCARS Program Management Reports.** Counties may print monthly AFCARS Program Management Reports from CWS/CMS to identify each case with missing or time-sensitive AFCARS data. The Program Management Reports are “PM-AFCARA – AFCARS Adoption Data Analysis” and “PM-AFCARF – Foster Care Data.”

The items below address specific errors in AFCARS reporting:

1. **Actions or Conditions Associated with Child’s Removal.** In some instances, all contributing reasons that led to the child’s removal from home and placement into foster care have not been properly indicated in CWS/CMS. Staff should select the primary and any secondary reasons leading to the child’s removal from home.
2. **Death or Incarceration of Parent(s).** When a child’s removal is due to the incarceration or death of the parent(s), staff should select *Caretaker Absence/Incapacity* from the dropdown window as the primary reason for removal and *Parent Absent – Death* or *Parent Absent – Incarceration* as a secondary reason.
3. **Create/Continue a Hearing Date.** The AFCARS report requires CWS/CMS to provide the actual date that a court hearing was held. If a hearing is not held on the date scheduled in CWS/CMS, staff should enter the rescheduled hearing date as soon as the information is available, and use the application functionality to indicate that it is a continued hearing.

4. **Hispanic Designation.** For AFCARS reporting purposes, a client, parent, or caretaker/substitute care provider should designate his or her own ethnicity, which staff enters as the primary ethnicity from a drop-down list. *Hispanic/Latino Origin* is a secondary designation and refers to whether the primary ethnicity of the person is of Hispanic/Latino origin.
5. **Case Plan Goals.** In some instances, this information has not been updated timely. The CDSS requests counties timely enter a case plan goal after approval by the court.
6. **Financial Aid Documentation/Foster Care Payments.** As part of future system planning, the CDSS is investigating functionality to build interfaces with eligibility systems. Until CWS/CMS is able to receive information from the CDSS or county systems, the only CWS/CMS source of this AFCARS data is from the information entered into CWS/CMS by county staff.
 - **Sources of Federal Support – Eligibility.** The CDSS requests that counties review their eligibility process and ensure that appropriate staff with the most accurate information inputs eligibility information into CWS/CMS.
 - **Child Support Data.** In CWS/CMS, staff should document receipt of any child support income by accessing the *Income and Property* page in the *FC2 Eligibility Application Notebook* and selecting *Child/Spousal Support Income* as the *Source of Income*.
 - **Amount of Monthly Foster Care Payment (regardless of source).** Staff should enter this data into the *Foster Care Placement Notebook* as the information is obtained.
7. **Foster Caretaker/Substitute Care Provider Data.** Foster caretaker/substitute care provider information is required whether they are licensed by the county or contracted by private placing agencies. This data is reported in AFCARS from information entered into CWS/CMS or retrieved from the Licensing Information System (LIS). (Foster Caretaker/Substitute Care Provider information is not required for Group Homes or Institutions although the *AFCARS Navigation Tool* may indicate otherwise.)
8. **Caretaker Family Structure/Foster Family Structure (married or unmarried couple, single female or male, or unable to determine).** Review findings showed that this information has not been consistently reported as required by AFCARS. The CDSS requests that counties timely enter family structure information as it is obtained.
9. **Caretakers' Birth Date.** In some instances, the date of birth has been entered incorrectly, indicating very young or very old caretakers. The CDSS requests that counties review birth date information to ensure that it is correctly entered.
10. **Clinically Diagnosed Disability(ies).** In some instances, this information has not been reported as required by AFCARS. Supervisors should remind staff to enter this information as soon as it is available.

- 11. Special Needs.** In some instances, the primary basis for determining special needs has not been correctly identified. This information should reflect the greatest barrier to a child's adoption. Supervisors should ensure that staff accurately enter and update this information as it is obtained or determined.
- 12. Mother's Marital Status at Child's Birth.** In some instances, the mother's marital status at the time of the child's birth is being entered in error as the mother's current marital status. The CDSS requests that counties ensure that the mother's marital status at the child's birth is correctly entered.
- 13. Termination of Parental Rights.** The actual "date of termination of parental rights" has been interpreted as either the date the case was heard in court, or the date the court order was signed. However, parental rights are terminated and the child is legally freed for adoption on the date the termination order is filed with the court. Therefore, the date entered into CWS/CMS for the termination of parental rights should be the same date the termination order was filed with the court. In cases where a parent signs a relinquishment, the date on which the relinquishment was acknowledged by the CDSS should be used. The date of termination of parental rights should be entered consistently and timely for both the foster care and adoption files.
- 14. Adoption Status of Child.** The determination of whether a child has ever been adopted applies to all children whether they are adopted through a private or public agency, within California or outside California. The appropriate information should be entered timely and consistently for all children.

Complete, accurate, and timely data entry in CWS/CMS is a critical factor impacting federal and State outcome measures and funding. It is also extremely important that workers have access to current, accurate records for the children and families they serve to ensure appropriate and effective services.

If you have any questions about this ACIN, you may contact me at (916) 657-2614. Your staff may contact Glenn Jue, Manager of the CMS Program Policy Unit, at (916) 657-4048 to discuss policy questions related to the ACIN. Staff may contact your county's CWS/CMS System Support Consultant at www.hwcws.cahwnet.gov/Contactlist/SSClist.asp regarding the *AFCARS Navigation Tool* or system application questions.

Sincerely,

MARY L. AULT
Deputy Director
Children and Family Services Division

c: County Welfare Directors Association